

Last thoughts on Bob Dylan

The reason I always wanted to write a book about Bob Dylan is that it's not just that he's a brilliant songwriter, but that he's also a great, great singer. In terms of songwriting he's written all kinds of songs, he's written songs that have come from deep within and he's also written songs that haven't come from deep within. I wanted to really write about the music.

- Peter Stone Brown, Crotun on Hudson, May 2018

I discovered Bob Dylan when I was 12, when I saw Pete Seeger sing "A Hard Rain's A-Gonna Fall" and "Who Killed Davey Moore" in concert at the beginning of the summer. I went away to camp and I didn't really pay attention to who he said wrote the songs. That summer "Blowin' in the Wind" by Peter, Paul and Mary was a huge hit, they played it on AM radio all the time but they never said who had written it they just played the songs.

And then I got home. My family had moved from the city to a small town in New Jersey and my brother came back from a different camp and a camp where a lot of people were into folk music because it was a left-wing camp and he told me about this guy named Bob Dylan who was following in the path of Woody Guthrie and we had both grown up listening to folk music. Our parents didn't have many records, they had a couple of records, but I knew who Woody Guthrie was, I didn't have to find out who Woody Guthrie was through Bob Dylan, I came from the other direction.

My brother played "Don't Think Twice, It's Alright" on the guitar and then over the summer he learned to play the harmonica and he had a harmonica holder and either that very night or the next night Dylan was on TV, the educational station, on this show about freedom songs and he sang "Only A Pawn In Their Game" and "Blowin' In The Wind", and he looked to me just like Woody Guthrie and then we got *The Freewheelin' Bob Dylan* and I was listening to that and of course songs like "Masters of War" but also songs like "Corrina, Corrina" and even "Bob Dylan's Blues", when he sang 'the Lone Ranger and Tonto came riding down the line fixing everybody's troubles, everybody's but mine', I thought that was pretty fucking funny and that November we saw him at the Mosque Theatre in New Jersey, it wasn't anywhere near sold out. We had seats in the

balcony and in the second half we moved up to the 10th or 8th row, we were terrified because we were kids. We didn't do that at concerts, but nobody was sitting there and we didn't get bothered. He sang some song songs off *The Freewheelin' Bob Dylan*, and there had been an article on him in Newsweek magazine that came out maybe a couple weeks before the show which said he didn't write "Blowin' In The Wind", that a kid in a New Jersey town did had written it, and it also had that Dylan's name wasn't really Dylan it was Bob Zimmerman.

At the show when he sang "Blowin' in the Wind", he said "here's the song Newsweek said I didn't write". He did a lot of songs I didn't know at the show, like "Talkin' John Birch Society Blues", he usually did a couple of talking blues, "The Walls of Red Wing", he may even have done "Restless Farewell", and "Who Killed Davey Moore" and "The Times They Are A Changin'" and "Hollis Brown". Hollis Brown was set to the music of this old ballad called "Pretty Polly" and I knew that the first time I saw him sing it because I had a record of Pete Seeger singing "Pretty Polly". But that didn't bother me because I knew that's how folk music worked.

Two months later that January I walked into a record store and was looking through the records and there was *The Times They Are A Changin'* and I just went boing! It was probably my first instant buy if not the first album I bought myself. And I took it home and it was on the turntable a lot for the next six months and that song "The Times They Are A Changin'", I mean when it had that verse about 'come mothers and fathers throughout the whole land don't criticize what you can't understand' that was pretty much it for me, I was like 'oh my god, this guy's saying what I'm thinking'. With songs like "The Lonesome Death of Hattie Carroll" and "With God On Our Side" - in fact, With God On Our Side was the encore at the concert in Newark - really kicked it off for me.

I was a kid and he was (for me) the perfect hero who showed up at just the right time. And his gift was that somehow he managed to say what I was feeling and the remarkable thing is that he still (often) says what I am feeling. And when you get down to it, that's the important thing, for me anyway.

But Dylan didn't perform all that much back then once he got out of the Village coffeehouses. A concert a year basically in each town (the one exception being the fall of '65 in NYC anyway). But back then you went to a Bob Dylan concert not only to see him, but to hear what he had to say and he delivered. He was looser then, and freer and funnier in a more open way. People would shout out questions and requests and he would answer directly, not just look at them strangely or something, and that original looseness is only starting to come back in the past few years though it has appeared from time to time most notably in the first

Rolling Thunder Tour. But back then it wasn't all wrapped up in myth and almost 40 years of fun and games.

These days it's kind of like well which song that I've been wanting to hear forever will he pull out, and will he pull it out at the show or show I go to, and if he does pull it out will it be great or will it just be a run through, or will it be unrecognizable, and then, will it be unrecognizably amazing or unrecognizably ridiculous, and will I change my mind a month or two later when I hear the tape or maybe a year later when I hear some other version done a million miles away. So it's a different game and a different atmosphere. Back then when he did one of his epic songs whether Desolation Row or It's Alright Ma, he did the whole song. Now he doesn't and sometimes, especially when you're at the show, you might be too wrapped up in the performance to even notice or care, and at other times I might say, he only did 3 verses, it was still just as long, but 10 minutes of it was guitar noodling and when the guitar noodling turns into guitar playing and goes somewhere then I don't care, but when it doesn't, I think damn it would've been nice if he sang a few more verses instead of playing the same 3 notes for 10 minutes. :-) But even those shows and I've seen my share of them never stopped me from going again the next time because you never know what he's gonna do and there's very few performers you can say that about and he never sings a song the same way twice period. And it's that aspect that keeps me coming back and I've been coming back for more of my life than not. So I hope in some weird way that answers your question. But I will say this, it's a shame that the Bob fans who've come on board whether due to their age or whatever have rarely gotten a chance to see him perform alone, one man with a guitar and a harp because there was nothing like it, and you had to be there, because whatever exists on film or video only gives a hint of what it was really like.

I always wanted to do the one interview no one ever did with Dylan, the music interview. If I had interviewed him, what I wanted to do - unlike say Mikail Gilmore - was not necessarily talk about the lyrics but talk about the music because what he slowly has done over the course of his career is explore just about every form of American Music there is. He started with blues, and old folk ballads, and blues has been the one constant throughout his career. You could make a real argument that he's really a blues singer. The only album where there isn't really a strict blues song is *The Times They Are A Changin'*, there's not really a blues song on that album, though there's a song with the word blues in it, but every other album has a song that is blues structured or blues patterns.

Elijah Wald in his book [Dylan Goes Electric!: Newport, Seeger, Dylan, and the Night That Split the Sixties](#) is the only Dylan person who wrote about Dylan that I've read who approaches Newport that Dylan played rock n roll in high school and then went to folk. That is the correct way to historically approach it because he did play rock n roll in high school, but he moved through country music.

What a lot of people think are his country albums I don't think are his country albums even though he did a third of *Self Portrait* where he was in Nashville with Nashville musicians cutting covers of classic country songs.

Dylan did not just stumble onto the folk scene either. He was introduced to it and turned on to it (according to books and legends :-)) at Univ. of Minn. And-- he got totally into it, and not the wimpy shit either. Many people who knew him back then commented on how he soaked up influences like a sponge. And so he explored blues, and American, English and Scottish traditional music. Learning, borrowing and stealing. Also, Woody Guthrie's music was never to be discounted. Guthrie showed him what could be written about in a song and the Beat and symbolist poets widened that. What Dylan already had growing up was the rock 'n' roll, country and R&B he heard late at night on the radio. That was his ace in the hole and he was smart enough (he may be from a hick town, but he is smart) to sort of keep it hidden (though his first album is rock 'n' roll disguised as folk) until he could make his move. Looking back, it's easy to see it was something he had to do. Remaining a folk singer was simply too artistically confining. To me, one of his greatest accomplishments is that he did mix it all up and confusing a lot of people in the process.

When I first saw Dylan in the 60s especially at the Halloween show at Philharmonic Hall, he was hysterical. He was really funny and as his writing progressed and he got into the symbolist poets like Rimbaud and his songs got more obscure people started taking him way too seriously. Not that he didn't deserve to be taken seriously but they elevated him to such a height that they missed the things that were funny. 'Desolation Row' is hysterical and the first time he sang it, which I saw, at Forest Hills Stadium in 1965, when he goes "one hand is tied to the tightrope walker the other is in his pants", the audience laughed hysterically and he delivered it with comic timing.

Twenty years later people would come along who weren't around at the time and everything became this irreverent thing, but a lot of the time Dylan is just kidding. There's even lines in *Brownsville Girl* which are hysterical like, "the only thing we knew about Henry Porter was that his name wasn't Henry Porter."

I hesitate putting Bob Dylan into categories, even obvious ones such as early Dylan, because even then it starts getting into how early. He went through such remarkable growth and changes, from the early ballads and topical songs of *The Times They Are A Changin'* to the surrealist epics. There was a definite change in the post-*Blonde on Blonde* songs and with that change came periods of extreme

highs and also periods of lows, followed again by periods of highs. But can we expect any artist who's had a career that is stretching closer and closer towards 70 years to be consistently great? As great and trailblazing as the albums through 1966 are, there is something else happening on the later albums, something that can't necessarily be defined and sometimes may go even deeper than the most classic songs of '65-'66. And while it may be a longer wait at times for the highs, and sometimes the real highs may be kept out of sight for a while like "Abandoned Love" and "Blind Willie McTell," I've never viewed Dylan as an artist in decline. I prefer to view him as an artist continuing.

I've maintained for years that Bob Dylan is out of his mind, just fucking crazy. Every time someone asks what is the best Bob Dylan book, I always say Ratso's *On The Road With Bob Dylan*, because it's the only one that gives a clue of what he's like as a person and also because it's hysterically funny. Who else would have the chutzpah to ask him, "Is eyes on Sad Eyed Lady a noun or a verb?"

No other performer fucks with his fans like Bob Dylan. When Suze Rotolo wrote her book, I'd hoped she would do a little book tour with readings but even if it had just been a signing, I would have gone. And what I would have said to her, was to ask if Bob ever said how much he liked Barry Goldwater, because on one level I've always wondered whether the Goldwater statement in *Chronicles Vol I* is just that, fucking with his fans. What I do know is it's not just his fans he fucks with, it's his friends as well and sometimes it's just hysterical. I think it's a thing he got into when he was really young and he just could never stop doing it. My two favourite examples are Dave Van Ronk telling him to read Rimbaud, Dylan responding with an idiotic "Huh!?", and Van Ronk going to his apartment, finding a copy of Rimbaud's *Complete Works* with handwritten annotations in the margins. Then ten years later Lowell George meets Dylan and George asks, "Do you ever listen to Jackson Browne?", receives an answer along the lines of who's that, then is invited to Dylan's house the same day, and is in the room with Dylan's albums and while Dylan goes out of the room to take a phone call, he checks out Bob's record collection and it includes every Jackson Browne album out at the time.

Dylan's whole thing is not being who he was before. Whoever he was before no longer exists. Before could be yesterday. Sara Dylan said this almost 40 years ago during the divorce: "It was like living with a different person every day." A statement I've always believed.

"I went home after that first day
and my wife never did understand me ever since that day.
That's when our marriage started breaking up.
She never knew what I was talking about,
what I was thinking about,
and I couldn't possibly explain it."

Bob Dylan

I read a book on *Blonde on Blonde* by Daryl Sanders called *Thin Wild Mercury Sound* and in talking about the NY Sessions the writer mentions Mike Bloomfield being at the January '66 sessions. This caused confusion way back on the Bootleg Series/No Direction Home soundtrack where they supposedly had 'Leopard Skin Pillbox Hat' with Bloomfield. On *The Cutting Edge* it lists Bloomfield as being at the January '66 sessions, which I'm sure is what the Sanders is basing is info on. To all of that I say, does anybody have ears? It's Robbie Robertson. Now I love both Bloomfield and Robbie Robertson, but they had two different very distinct styles of playing. Bloomfield played these incredible mind-boggling runs where upon hearing them you just say holy shit, how the fuck does he do that? Robbie on the other hand played in these short dynamic energetic bursts of explosive sound. But you'd be hard-pressed to find a guitar run in any of his leads. And of course they both played with different guitar tones. Having read more than one Mike Bloomfield biography, and having read several of his interviews in addition to hearing some on the radio, I was under the impression that once Bloomfield turned down Dylan for the '65 fall tour, that was it for a long time, even though there is a picture of them backstage at the Woody Guthrie Memorial concert at Carnegie Hall in 1968. I distinctly remember Bloomfield saying in an interview that Dylan has a thing about loyalty.

I had *John Wesley Harding* and for 12 years I was trying to figure out what that song was about because none of the interpretations

that I read in any of the reviews of the album made any sense. Robert Shelton said it was about Vietnam, others thought it was about immigrants coming to America but after *Slow Train Coming* came out I decided I might as well check out the bible. So I read the bible, treating it pretty much as a book, and lo and behold in the Old Testament in Leviticus during exodus there's this section called the blessings of obedience, where Moses talks to God. The Jews are in the desert fleeing Egypt but they're messing up, and God is talking to Moses and God is saying if they don't start acting right and believing in him and paying attention to him 'their heaven will be like iron, their tears will be like rain' and I just went "holy shit, what kind of person writes a song from that perspective where the I is God?", but if you go back and you read any of the interviews where Dylan talks about *John Wesley Harding* starting with the interview he gave to Happy Traum in Sing Out magazine in 1968, he says 'I'm not in the songs', the 'I is another'. And he has maintained that about that album throughout in all of the interviews. More than 20 years later when he did the Song Talk interview with Paul Zollo he said the same thing, so he's remained consistent in that regard, in the interviews where he's not putting people on, and that's one of the things that shows his brilliance to me as a songwriter as well as his sense of humour.

People started leaking the original Basement Tapes, a 12 (or 13) song demo in '68. I got my first copy on reel to reel around Christmas 68. In '69, it started appearing on bootlegs, first as *Great White Wonder*, but the bootlegs mixed it up with other stuff from the early '60s and some '65 outtakes. The bootlegs may have been in California in '68, but they didn't hit the East Coast until '69. A few years later, a couple of more songs leaked like 'I'm Not There' and "Sign on the Cross" and "Odds and Ends" and about ten years later even more stuff leaked, a lot of the covers, but also some Band stuff including stuff with Tiny Tim. When Columbia finally put out the first Basement Tapes in '75, no one knew about "Goin' To Acapulco". Then in the '90s, even more stuff leaked. And when they finally put out the complete thing a couple of years ago, there was even more stuff no one knew about.

Somewhere in the period following *Nashville Skyline*, there was a quote from Dylan's mother (I forget where it appeared) where she

said the *Nashville Skyline* voice was his real voice. If you listen to "See That My Grave Is Kept Clean" from the Basement Tapes, you can hear him start to go into that voice during the course of the song. Similarly on "Copper Kettle" on Self Portrait, he does the reverse, starting with the crooning voice and moving into his rougher voice. On the *Karen Wallace Tape* from May 1960, Dylan sings the ballad, "The Two Sisters" in a voice astoundingly close to *Nashville Skyline*. When I first heard this, I was on the road, and on the way, a friend gave me a tape of *The Genuine Bootleg Series* to listen to in the car. Since I was driving I didn't look at the list of songs to see when it was recorded and at first I thought it was a bad quality recording from 1969. When I finally got home and looked at the date my mind was blown.

Way back in '69, my friend Dave Gershen who would later sing in the band Borderline said to me, "I think Dylan's reached a place where his dreams and reality are all one."

No one ever asks Dylan about guitars, and clearly he has a lot of guitars. No one talks about the changes in his harp style. When he started all the music critics like Robert Shelton talked about Woody and Sonny Terry in terms of harp, but I realized about 20 or 30 years ago, the guy who really influenced him on harp was Jimmy Reed.

Learning how to lead a band

The Never Ending Tour (NET) has been a tour of moments. Sometimes he'd hit it, sometimes not, and I suspect that's one of the reasons that they (Sony) have been really slow in putting stuff out, along with that they know everyone has the bootlegs.

Even though I've written probably close to 100 reviews of NET shows, for me a good part of the NET was Dylan learning how to lead a band for the first time. When he went on tour in '64 and '65 backed by Levon and The Hawks, they were musicians who pretty much knew how to do it with the songs that they did, it didn't work out that way first in the studio and then when he finally returned to the road in '74 they were with him again and they pretty much did the same thing, the same approach.

The next band he had after that was kind of the opposite, the Rolling Thunder band, which was this rag-tag ensemble of musicians from all over. But they somehow made it work. Later on, the gospel band, they were all pros and so they kind of knew what to do, so he didn't really have to actually lead the band because he had great musicians backing him that knew what to do and (Tim) Drummond and (Jim) Keltner were key to that.

Then he did that weird European tour in 1984 with all European musicians and you can't say that's one of his great bands, because he doesn't like to rehearse, I mean he does rehearse but you know he's like 'however it gets played is how it happens'.

The next big tour after that was (Tom) Petty and that was another established band that was already happening. Mike Campbell and Benmont Tench are great musicians, but the Petty tour for the most part was one that looked great on paper, but not in execution. Whether this was due to Dylan (and there are some pretty funny stories from Petty about the rehearsals) or the Heartbreakers is hard to tell.

The Farm Aid appearance was terrific and when the tour was announced, I had high hopes, thinking well this could be the best band since The Band. Didn't turn out that way, didn't come close. While there is the occasional good song or performance here and there, the four shows I saw on the '86 tour were among the most boring, most un-heartfelt, least intense and most mechanical of any Dylan shows I've seen. But a lot of it has to do with the Heartbreakers as well and not just Dylan's eccentricities in rehearsing (never doing a song the way way twice etc.). I've seen Petty & the Heartbreakers several times over many years (with and without Dylan) and they are one of the least spontaneous of any band I've ever seen and their shows come across as pre-packaged. It's a strange thing because they are excellent musicians, their interviews show their heart is in the right place in terms of knowing about rock and roll, but it doesn't translate to the stage.

The Dead rehearsals were way better than the shows, and most importantly they reminded him of songs he'd written but forgotten. The downside of the Dead tour - leading to him thinking he was a lead guitarist, the beach ball atmosphere of Dead shows, but also sort of a strategic move on his part trying to attract and capitalize on the Dead audience.

When Dylan finally decided to drop the background singers and all that excess and go out with a little four piece band, at first with G.E Smith, Smith was probably the leader or as they're called now, musical director, not that's an official title, that's something that fans assign to it. There was stuff to like and some interesting transitions happened like going right from Most of The Time into

Watchtower. The acoustic stuff was great, but again Smith plays pretty much the same thing on every song. He may know Pretty Peggy-O, but he doesn't know what to do with it. I believe that was the only time it was just Bob with another guitar player with the exception of Bruce Langhorne on the Les Crane show. The thing I dug about Robbie (and Bloomfield too) was Robbie would respond to the lyrics. I never got the feeling GE was responding to the lyrics. When G.E left that was when Dylan really had to take charge and lead things for the first time. The only problem was he'd decided he was a lead guitar player, which he wasn't, so it took a really long time for that stuff to gel. To me it gelled at certain points along the way, but it was never as great as it could have been.

When Larry Campbell finally came on board, (and I barely knew about him before that), I was like FINALLY, a real lead player, one who plays country on the country stuff and blues on the blues stuff. And what made him interesting and special was he could play a mess of instruments. These days Campbell can't help but be sarcastic when mentioning Bob at his shows. I remember going to a show after Larry Campbell joined when Dylan toured with Van Morrison. Dylan opened the show but Van's band was so much tighter and I thought to do this show he really needs The Band behind him because there was such a difference in the two bands and how tight they were and it wasn't that Dylan's band wasn't tight, it just didn't have the same force that Van's band did.

So a large part of the Never Ending Tour despite some of my reviews was that it took him a really long time to really take charge of the band to get it to where he wanted, not that I always agreed with his moves and what he did with certain songs. The whole thing about having two really great guitar players there and he would take the solos, was just ridiculous, it wasn't that he couldn't play guitar, because he can, but he's not a lead player. Basically he had to learn how to lead a band and I don't think he got there till 1999 or till Love And Theft.

Love And Theft

Love And Theft stayed in my CD player for 6 months if not longer and I considered it in a lot of ways in a sense to be his most autobiographical record, like those lines in Honest With Me like he never wanted to go back to his home town and his parents advice

was still oozing out of his ears, I felt like that was really him. A lot of people were like 'why is he doing Honest With Me again?' and I think he was doing it because of those lines. I also don't view Love and Theft and Modern Times as a pair. I also don't think Dylan's written a truly great song, meaning from his heart and his gut since Love And Theft. I don't feel inclined to sing any of them, and the ones I did feel inclined to sing didn't stay with me very long.

The albums after Love and Theft he kind of stopped writing from deep within and one of the ways I know that is that even the songs on Love And Theft, as a performer myself I didn't even really want to sing them - some of them were too hard to learn - and even if I did learn them they didn't stay with me very long. After that, there were times he was trying, but he really wasn't getting there. Workingman's Blues on one level is a beautiful song but it doesn't quite get where he wants it to go. And later I learned Pay in Blood and I did it once and had no desire to do it again.

Maybe if I went back and listened to those records again they'd hit me in a different way sometimes that happens, but, the one thing was he was definitely concentrating on the music aspect of things, from getting the band to be what he wanted it to do, of course it was always different in concert and you know the bands changed.

For a long time they were doing this thing where he'd play a riff on piano and Donnie Herron would be watching him intently, echo that riff and pass it on to the band and the band would riff on whatever that riff was for a while, but these days Donnie Herron is not watching him so intently anymore. In 2018 it was taking sometimes known and more often obscure rock n rolls riffs whether its forms of surfing music, the beach boys or some old rockabilly guy and putting his songs to that. It doesn't always work, it's fun in concert but it doesn't always musically work and because in a lot of songs eventually he'd return to his original way of doing it - sort of. Like "It Ain't Me Babe", he's done it in like a thousand arrangements.

Dylan went through periods, he went through a big bluegrass period - actually a Stanley brothers period more than any other bluegrass people and Johnny and Jack and people like that - and then he started moving towards Western Swing, although he never

completely got there he sort of went in the opposite direction and all of that eventually led to the Sinatra stuff although that wasn't till ten years later.

It's become apparent that what he's really into is exploring American Music, but also that the cut and paste method has overtaken his writing, and how the great quotable lines are not necessarily great quotable Bob Dylan lines because he copped them from somewhere else.

Somewhere we learned from *Tell Tale Signs* that a lot of songs, and even more lines, he'd had for a long time and he was trying them out in various places until he found a home for them. One of the most important things about the Bootleg Series is that it reveals in many ways the way Dylan writes, how once he finds a line he likes, he will try that line out in a bunch of places until it finally finds a home. And he never stopped doing that.

And while Tempest showed some signs of getting away from cut and paste, there's an uninviting nasty edge to many of the songs ultimately reaching the conclusion that Dylan hasn't been able to (or maybe doesn't want to) connect with that place deep within (in terms of his original songs) since Time Out Of Mind and some of the songs on L&T, for instance Sugar Baby.

Time out of Mind

One of the things I wanted to hear in the archives is the Jim Dickinson mix for *Time Out Of Mind*. Most of the songs on *Time out of Mind* depict someone who can't wait to leave where he is, for various reasons, from the light being bad to the room temperature or anything else you might want to pick. Something is continually making this person crazy, there's no solace anywhere. Sounds pretty desperate to me. Other than that it's basically a blues album. My problem with Daniel Lanois in general is he is always making Daniel Lanois records no matter who the artist is. I suspect Dylan had more of a bluesy album in mind.

The good thing about *Oh Mercy* was that Lanois kind of made Bob work (maybe) when he might not have been inclined to do so. With *Time out of Mind*, when you read about all the production technological bullshit he put songs through to obtain a

blues (meaning kind of a Chess or Sun Records) sound, Bob achieved that sound without all the bullshit on *"Love And Theft."* I think the spooky songs are because Bob writes spooky songs, simple as that whether for the *Basement Tapes*, *Time Out of Mind* or any other album that has spooky songs.

When I was working on the liner notes for what was later named Tell Tale Signs, I remember one night around 4:30 AM deciding to go back to the original (well the remastered version) of "Most of the Time" just to compare and since it was that time I had headphones on and I couldn't believe the amount of echo. But there's little doubt in my mind that Lanois is why Dylan decided to produce himself.

I have this record my mom bought when I was a kid that's an Alan Lomax album with Peggy Seeger, Guy Carawan and some other people. This record was key when Time Out Of Mind came out and a bunch of people were trying to figure out the sources of all the lines in "Trying To Get To Heaven" which is almost entirely composed of lines from old folk songs. I was the one who got the Riding In A Buggy With Mary Jane line, because Peggy Seeger sings the song on that album. But there's a bunch of other songs on this one album that either he covered or used lines from, so if I'd ever interviewed Dylan I would love to just say, "You ever see this record?"

Bob Dylan's Voice

The vocal thing – it's really all about when you came in. I came in pretty early, and I saw him with Levon and the Hawks from the first row. I know it's not going to get better than that no matter how great he is. I have friends who are lot younger than me, and they view him from where they came in, so they will marvel at some version of a song from the Never Ending Tour where I'll be like it's okay, but this one's way better

While Dylan's voice has changed and is pretty much different on almost every album with Bringing It All Back Home and Highway 61 both done in the same year the closest, the change you're talking about started happening in the late 80s and worsened in the 90s and continued to get worse with the summer of 2003 being the worst. I'm sure smoking has a lot to do with it, but also he probably never learned how to properly sing. He sings from his throat, the stomach has to get involved. In concert, a lot of times not all the time, his voice gets better after he warms up. Also when the current band came aboard, they played a lot quieter than the previous band. But if you go to Boblinks and check out my reviews which started I guess around 96 or 97, I've been saying his voice is shot for years. Look for ones in Philly or NYC.

Was the hideous Wolfman growl in 2003 his Charlie Patton phase or was his voice totally fucked up? On one level the Sinatra albums are him proving to himself that he can sing again when he wants to, and key to this is the Charlie Sexton quote about how the volume of the band got lower over the past 10, 15 years, something pointed out in my reviews.

Dylan's guitarists

My favourite Bob guitarists remain Bloomfield and Robbie. While their styles and approach were different, the one thing they did was play off the lyrics.

Larry and Charlie are easily among the better players he's had. Sexton can be great when Bob lets him play. Of the two Sexton as a guitarist is way more interesting and way more driven. Sexton can be great when Bob lets him play. But I also really like Donnie Herron. I didn't like GE Smith. Yeah he can play fast and is technically proficient, but he has zero taste, no sense of tone, plays the same fucking thing no matter what the song.

Those who say Denny Freeman is paint my numbers as a guitarist are morons because he is anything but a standard guitar player. He is coming from somewhere else entirely. I often tried to explain what I thought Denny Freeman was doing. A hell of a lot of Bob fans hated him. Ultimately for me, I don't think he was the right guitar player for Bob.

I saw Stu Kimball when he was the lead guitar player and though I understand his later role in the band, I thought he was a good lead player and every once in awhile he still did play lead.

I swear Bob has always been looking for the Bloomfield replacement, and Duke Robillard might have been it. I saw him twice - check out the Bethlehem PA show from that tour. He was supposed to be on TOOM, but Lanois replaced all his tracks.

What happened was - and there's a video on one of the songs at I think Atlanta - Robillard took a solo got into it, and kept soloing, meanwhile Bob's staring right at him and he doesn't notice. Bob

reamed him out after the show and he walked. Later that night or the next day he posted on Facebook he was selling all his Dylan records.

Bloomfield or Robbie on Blonde on Blonde

Bob and finger-picking

One of the cool things Larry Campbell did was bring back Bob's finger-picking parts (well... not exactly, but not all that far either) on some of those old songs. Of course the arrangement on this song is now something completely different or was on the last tour. Bob has been known to occasionally not use a flat-pick, the thing is even with modern technology, unless you're a player who does it all the time it is hard to get volume finger-picking, especially if you don't use finger-picks. And the thing about using finger-picks is they're basically a drag, 'cause they get loose, they fall off, they fly off. Bob's thing in concert is an energy thing and you can get that energy thing happening a lot easier with a flat-pick if that's the way you usually play. Now this isn't to say there aren't guitar players who finger-pick and get that same thing happening because there's plenty from Doc Watson to the (late) Rev. Gary Davis to John Hammond Jr., to name just a few.

Back when Bob was playing the clubs, he did do some finger-picking live, and with the exception of the live "Tomorrow Is A Long Time" on *Greatest Hits 2*, when he started moving to bigger halls that ended, and by '64, he had stopped entirely.

The Gospel according to Bob Dylan

I was at the Hartford show, where he delivered the San Francisco rap. Despicable. I probably booed, and didn't listen to Bob after that for almost a year. It took everything in me not to shout out, "What happened to the 'Chimes of Freedom,' Bob?". Because Chimes of Freedom is about just that freedom, and is like a long list of various types of people in search of freedom, and what he said in the San Francisco rap was the opposite of that.

He simply did not sway me at the show. It took me 30 years to get a copy of that show, and it wasn't as bad as I thought at the time. And of course I knew exactly what I was going to see.

I didn't have a problem with the songs. I loved *Slow Train* (the album) when it came out because the singing was so intense and I'd kind of been expecting it since *John Wesley Harding* along with certain songs on *The Basement Tapes*. At the same time there were certain lines on some of the songs on *Slow Train* (not so much on *Saved*) that were really annoying and some cases stupid ("Sheiks walking around with gold rings" etc.) What was a drag was that he went with the right wing version of Christ, instead of say the Catholic Worker version. :) *Saved* of course wasn't as good, and you kind of nail why in your article. I panned the shit out of it when it came out, then a few years later found myself liking it. Well I always liked *Pressing On* and the harp on *What Can I Do For You*, and am probably the only person in the world who realizes that on *Are You Ready* he got as close harp-wise to Little Walter he was ever gonna get.

There are few better rhythm teams than Jim Keltner and Tim Drummond. One of the most interesting things about Dylan's so-called gospel period is that it was his true return to rock 'n' roll.

Sometime very early in 1981, a friend of mine who was not a huge Bob fan calls me up, and says, "You have to come to my parent's house right away. My friend Joel Bernstein is here and he has a tape of a new Bob song that you of all people have to hear." My friend went to high school with Bernstein. Well, his parent's house was in the suburbs and at the time I didn't have a car, but I borrowed one. Joel, who was a really nice guy, had "Every Grain Of Sand," the demo with Jennifer Warnes and the dog. He said, "You

can't have it, but I'll play it as many times as you want." I probably made him play it like ten times. I ended up talking to him until some ridiculous hour like 3 am. He went back to San Francisco and scored me a bunch of Bob boots from 1978 that you couldn't get on the East Coast at the time. I didn't hear that version of Every Grain of Sand again until the first Bootleg Series came out.

Meeting Bob Dylan

I did shake Bob's hand once at the Songwriters Hall of Fame induction. After his portion of the ceremony was over, he left his table and all of a sudden I realized most of the other journalists who were seated in the balcony were gone. I went down the ballroom lobby, and he was giving an interview (said Just Like A Woman was his favorite song).

After the interview he was standing there with Jacques Levy like seven feet away, and I'm like should I, shouldn't I - this will never happen again. So I walked over and shook his hand and said, "Bob, my brother Tony Brown says hello." And he just looked at me and he has these piercing blue eyes. Jacques Levy said, "Good bass player." And I walked away. It was probably ten seconds if that, but it seemed like a lot longer.

Search and destroy

Bob's lead guitar playing: I call it search and destroy and when I do I like to stick a little copyright symbol next to it. It might be the Garcia influence, except he started doing it in the early '80s. Even more infuriating is that he has two great guitarists on stage (down to one these days) and never lets them play, while he plays his 3 note lead over and over again. I actually started wondering if he hits the really bad notes on purpose, so when he finally gets it right (and he always keeps going till he gets it right) that the final solo will have much more impact.

In an interview sometime in the last 20 years he started talking about Lonnie Johnson and playing certain numbers that were different than one four five, but no guitar player I know could figure out what he was talking about. Every once in a while, I see him pull off a decent solo, so he can do it when he wants to, but he knows nothing about bending notes. When he was still playing guitar, I used to watch his hands trying to figure out what he was doing (when he was playing rhythm too), and I don't know what the hell the chords were he was playing.

One time I think in the '90s I was going to some Dylan show in NYC and stopped by brother's on the way, and he was like "he shouldn't be allowed near an electric guitar."

The thing is he was a very cool rhythm guitar player and his rhythms would drive the band. When he left the rhythm up to others, it would lose something, kind of the same way say John Lee Hooker was if he didn't have the right band which was most of the time, because they'd force him into a standard rhythm. One of my favorite Hooker albums (with a band) is Live at the Cafe Au Go Go because he's backed by the Muddy Waters Band, and they knew what to do.

When Dylan played in the '60s, like say around Another Side/Bringing It All Back Home, he had all these cool little tricks with various drop tunings and using the capo not only to get the right key, but also to get a certain sound, and he always had some kind of bass pattern going on.

Just as weird is when he switched to playing keyboard around 2002, he was playing some stupid electronic thing, usually getting an organ sound and taking equally ridiculous solos. Astounding for someone who's worked with some of the best keyboard players in rock and roll. And he just sort of fit the keyboard into whatever arrangements the band was already doing. It took him ten years to stop that, and do what he should've done all along, play a real piano, and base the arrangements around what he was doing on the piano. Once he did that, things got a lot better. I think he's basically insane.

I Pity The Poor Immigrant

Assholes in the audience

Almost all my Bob reviews mention assholes in the audience who usually sit right near me. It's totally ridiculous. Of course I'm old school. But when I first went to concerts including the early Bob concerts, you shut up during the song, and at most you whispered between songs. Somewhere along the line people got this ludicrous notion of 'it's a rock concert, I can do what I want'. Well Bob never was a fucking rock concert. My favorite line now 'cause it usually works, which I stole off a Facebook group called "Shut Up While The

Band Is Playing" is: "Is Bob Dylan interrupting your conversation?" It works a lot better than "shut the fuck up" because the offender has to think about it.

How to listen to Planet Waves

Several years ago I decided the best way to listen to Planet Waves is to play Side 2 first so the album begins and ends with Forever Young)

You think it's gonna get better than that?

I've seen him 140 times and really don't need to see him again. My attitude despite a million reviews of Never Ending Tour shows is I saw him from a front row center seat with Levon & The Hawks in 1965. Do you think it's gonna get better than that? Not that there haven't been some great concerts. The Rolling Thunder show I saw was amazing, the fall '81 tour was great and the real deal. But in comparison with a couple of exceptions like The Supper Club which was also great, the NET has been a tour of moments. The last two times I saw Bob were so so. The 2nd show at The Tower here in 2017 was really good where he was pretty much on from the first note and clearly having fun throughout. It was a luck of the draw. The show the night before wasn't anywhere near as good.

Sweetheart Like You

I have a crazy theory that the woman in "Sweetheart Like You" is the Statue of Liberty.

Dylan and appropriations

I've had major differences with Scott Warmuth over the years, mainly because he uses a google to find a lot of stuff that he finds, and I prefer a more organic way of doing it. It's been known for years Dylan borrows lines and melodies and always has. I like discovering them on my own or when discussing this stuff with other people, someone has a record or something like that.

Warmuth and I really got into it I think around Modern Times where I said on one of the Bob forums he pounces like a cat. The damn record wasn't out yet, and he's googling lines taking them out

of the context in which they were used. We've sort of settled our differences in that regard.

But the very first time I saw Dylan in 1963, he did Hollis Brown. Times They Are A-Changin' wasn't out yet, but I knew he was using the song "Pretty Polly" as the melody because I had the song on a Pete Seeger record. When I was a kid my dad gave me "American Ballads". It was because of that album that when Bob did Hollis Brown the first time I saw him that I knew he got the melody from Pretty Polly. It didn't bother me, people did that stuff all the time in folk music. Woody used the same song for Pastures of Plenty though he changed the melody a tiny bit.

After Empire Burlesque came out, one night I'm watching the Hustler on TV, and Piper Laurie says to Paul Newman, "I got troubles, you got troubles, maybe we better leave each other alone." Well that line is in "Seeing The Real You At Last," and bells went off. Much later when I got on the internet I found out the entire song is composed of lines from movies, and my reaction was what kind of mind even thinks like that.

When Love And Theft came out, same thing, and people realized there was a shitload of sources, both musical and literary which was when Scott Warmuth appeared. There was this guy named Artur Jarosinski, who was a cool guy who passed away about 7 years ago, who was from Poland, and he had this site called the Annotated Love And Theft, where you could contribute sources and a lot of people myself included took part. He also had one for Time Out Of Mind. So all this is nothing new.

Rolling Thunder

I saw the Hartford Show and it wasn't that way at all. Neuwirth as MC of first half of show might have shown some slight swagger, and maybe Rob Stoner doing Catfish, but he kind of always did that long before playing with Bob. But at the same time the show itself was wonderful and fun and full of all kinds of magic. And yes, it was long, close to four hours, but during the equally long ride home we couldn't stop talking about what we'd just seen. The show as you obviously know was a real revue, and there were tons of surprises -- surprises that on the original 75 tour apparently happened at every stop. The surprise in Hartford was Rick Danko, doing the live debut

of "It Makes No Difference," with Allen Ginsberg on tambourine and then later on instrumentalist Sandy Bull. But then we had no idea either that Joni Mitchell had become part of the tour. And in a certain sense Dylan may never have been more magical and alive on stage.

'76 had its moments, but the sound of the band had changed, but more importantly the vibe had also changed.

Isis was something that had to be seen and I have yet to hear a version from '76 that comes close to '75 musically or otherwise. The acoustic stuff is universally good both years. But while the stop/start arrangements of '76 may be more "interesting" whatever that's supposed to mean, it doesn't mean they were necessarily improved. Often instruments are simply not in tune, crashing into one another and Bob's singing while perhaps not the shouting you refer to in quite the same way is often exaggerated, or more to the point, over-emoting. Perhaps the dawn of Dylan self-parody.

I don't find his singing to be more interesting. There are rare moments such as the San Antonio "Spanish Is The Loving Tongue" which stands a chance of blowing away all live performances from '76, '75 and '74. But as I said the acoustic songs and the duets with Baez, whether acoustic or electric, but particularly the acoustic ones such as "Railroad Boy" and "Deportees" are amazing.

Shelter From The Storm from Hard Rain is good as a curiosity. The band is terrible, Dylan's guitar is outrageously out of tune and he'd apparently forgotten how to play slide guitar which he once knew how to do. It's fun to watch the same way Maggie's Farm is fun to watch, but any semblance of subtlety is severely lacking. Whereas the studio track which has never been bettered in any live performance gives you a sense of mystery, a sense of those other lifetimes, the main emotion on the Hard Rain version is anger. The shouting of the last word of each line is (such as always safe and WARM) is substantially no different than the shouting from Tour '74. And of course the cocained calamity of Guam while charming in a rough way comes nowhere near approaching the soulful proficiency or the intensity of The Band.

Yonder Comes Sin

Whenever he wrote it, "Yonder Comes Sin" is not up there with "Carribean Wind," "Groom" or "Every Grain Of Sand" either in performance and especially lyrically or musically. One can see why it wasn't considered for an album. It's a decidedly minor rant against whatever it was he thinks he is ranting about.

The Basement Tapes

People started leaking the original 12 (or 13) song demo in 68, which is what that is. I for my first copy on reel to reel around Christmas 68. In 69, it started appearing on Boots first as Great White Wonder, but the boots mixed it up with other stuff from the early 60s and some 65 outtakes. The boots may have been in California in 68, but didn't heat the East Coast until 69. Then a few years later, a couple of more songs leaked like I'm Not There and Sign on the Cross and Odds and Ends. About ten years later even more stuff leaked, a lot of the covers, but also some Band stuff and the stuff with Tiny Tim. And of course when Columbia finally put out the first Basement Tapes in 75, no one knew about Acapulco. Then in the fucking 90s, even more stuff leaked. And when they finally put out the complete thing a couple of years ago, there was even more stuff no one knew about.

he thing is that Dylan did not just stumble onto the folk scene. He was introduced to it and turned on to it (according to books and legends :-) at Univ. of Minn. And-- he got totally into it, and not the wimpy shit either. Many people who knew him back then commented on how he soaked up influences like a sponge. And so he explored blues, and

American, England and Scottish traditional music. Learning, borrowing and stealing. Also, Woody Guthrie's music was never to be discounted. Guthrie showed him what could

be written about in a song and the Beat and symbolist poets widened that. What Dylan already had growing up was the rock 'n' roll, country and R&B he heard late at night on the radio. That was his ace in the hole and he was smart enough (he may be from a hick town, but he is smart) to sort of keep it hidden (though his first album is rock 'n' roll disguised as folk) until he could make his move. Looking back, it's easy to see it was something he had to do. Remaining a folk singer was simply too artistically confining. To me, one of his greatest accomplishments is that he did mix it all up and confusing a lot of people in the process.